

My say...

Don't blame the man on the dole

THE Institute of Public Affairs has called for an "end to the practice of grossly exaggerating the human suffering involved in an unemployment level that seldom rises above 2 per cent."

In a statement last week, the IPA claimed that unemployment does not impose "desperate hardship on the majority of those unemployed."

This is a mischievous statement because it assumes that hardship is acceptable until it becomes desperate and until it affects a majority.

What the IPA is basically saying about the unemployed is that one-third are teenagers looked after by their parents, another third are females who do not matter and the remaining third have something wrong with them.

First, the IPA claims that "many of those unemployed could obtain jobs if they were prepared to move to a new locality or take on work of a different kind to that preferred."

An unemployed carpenter in Melbourne is expected to leave or uproot his wife and four children for a job in Portland.

Individuals should not be expected to accept employment opportunities different from the type of employment they normally pursue. An unemployed clerk should not be expected to become an employed laborer.

The right to work is a right to congenial work. The right to job security and satisfaction. The right to make a living from work.

Secondly, the IPA claims that in assessing the hardships caused by unemployment the most vital factor is the length of time people are out of work.

In February, 1969, the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics conducted a survey of the work experience of persons aged 15 years and over during 1968:

46,400 were unemployed for two periods;

22,200 were unemployed for three periods;

38,300 were unemployed for four or more periods.

There are in fact many people who go through several periods of unemployment. A short-term period of unemployment can have long-term consequences.

There is a tendency for low-status unskilled and semi-skilled occupations in mines, factories, steel works, shipyards, offices and shops to be filled by low-status groups — the migrants, the handicapped, the young and the old.

Low-status jobs and

low-status people are ill-paid.

Low-paid workers survive from week to week and one weekly period of unemployment means mounting debts that are virtually impossible to repay.

Thirdly, the IPA claims that about one-third of the unemployed are difficult to place in jobs because of physical or mental handicaps, age disability or character defects.

This is a crude version of blaming the victim — individuals are responsible for their own handicaps, disabilities and defects.

The real issue is that

hardship of any kind is unnecessary and undesirable.

At the end of December, 1972, there were 47,548 persons receiving unemployment benefits — 34.8 per cent of the 136,769 persons unemployed.

There is little point in blaming the unemployed for being unemployed when there are no jobs, when the available jobs are inaccessible, when the jobs exclude the unqualified and inexperienced and when jobs are repetitive, monotonous and dehumanising.

It is time that we questioned this situation, clarified our attitudes towards the unemployed, considered what their needs are and had the courage to decide whether we are willing to provide for those needs.